

People - LAMBERT

Friend gets first award in memory of Brittany

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DUXBURY — While Brittany Lambert was fighting off a rare blood disorder that causes leukemia, Stephanie Carlson remained by her side, keeping her company in good times and bad.

Brittany lost her battle last October at age 13, and Stephanie has had to go on without her best friend. Yesterday, Stephanie was presented the first Brittany Lambert Rainbow Award, a tribute to her positive attitude, determination, courage and acceptance of new challenges.

Stephanie's eighth-grade classmates at the Duxbury Middle School nominated her for the award.

"Stephanie is a quiet, kind girl, and her peers really respected her and I think really respected the friendship that existed between Brittany and Stephanie," said guidance counselor Kathleen Dunn, who chaired yesterday's awards ceremony.

"They recognized that Brittany and Stephanie were best friends, and I think that they respected the qualities in Stephanie that allowed her to stand by Brittany throughout her illness, keep her company in good times and in bad."

Brittany was diagnosed with myelodysplasia, a rare blood disorder that leads to a form of leukemia, in 1996. The town of Duxbury rallied behind her, and more than 2,000 people braved a heavy downpour in August 1996 to attend a bone marrow drive for Brittany. Stephanie's parents helped organize the drive, Dunn said.



Lambert

After one bone marrow match fell through, another donor surfaced and Brittany underwent transplant surgery in February 1997. The operation failed.

"At the ceremony, it was a really bittersweet experience for Stephanie," Dunn said. "I could see that she was really moved and overwhelmed to receive this award."

Brittany's mother, Linda Haehnel, and sister, Brianne Lambert, a sophomore at Duxbury High School, presented the award.

The Rainbow Award isn't the only way Brittany's memory is being kept alive. A scholarship in her name was given to a Duxbury High School senior, and a road race in her name will be held Oct. 24.

The Brittany Lambert Foundation has been established to assist families whose children have life-threatening illnesses or injuries. The foundation has a junior board of directors, made up of students and headed by Brianne Lambert.

Lambert has been working with middle school students, and today the group planned to celebrate Brittany's 14th birthday at Children's Hospital. They have collected gifts for children in the hospital's cancer and bone marrow transplant units. After passing out the presents, they'll eat cake and ice cream.